

Lady Justice Is Blind?

Jury Decision-Making & Mitigating Circumstances Simulation

Course: Civics / Government / Law

Grade Level: 9–12

Time Required: 60–75 minutes

Topic: Rule of Law, Jury Responsibility, Justice vs. Mercy

Lesson Overview

In this simulation, students serve as members of a **jury** and must render verdict decisions based strictly on the law and evidence. After initial verdicts are reached, students are introduced to **mitigating circumstances** that challenge their decisions.

Students must evaluate whether justice should be applied objectively (“blind”) or influenced by context, fairness, and compassion.

Essential Question

Should justice be completely blind, or should circumstances and intent influence legal decisions?

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the role of juries in the judicial system
 - Apply legal definitions to real-world scenarios
 - Evaluate how mitigating circumstances influence justice
 - Distinguish between legal guilt and moral responsibility
 - Defend decisions using evidence and reasoning
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Key Civics Connections

- Rule of Law

- Due Process
 - Jury Responsibility
 - Equal Protection
 - Justice vs Mercy
-

Teacher Instructions

Step 1 — Introduction (5 minutes)

Display an image of **Lady Justice** (blindfold, scales).

Ask:

Why is Lady Justice blindfolded?

Explain:

- Justice should be impartial
 - Decisions should be based on law, not emotion
-

Step 2 — Jury Simulation (20 minutes)

Students work in groups of 3–4.

They will:

- Read each case
- Apply the law provided
- Decide a **preliminary verdict**

Remind students:

You are deciding based on the law and evidence only.

Step 3 — Mitigating Circumstances (15 minutes)

Students receive additional information.

They must:

- Reconsider their verdict
 - Discuss whether circumstances should matter
-

Step 4 — Whole Class Discussion (10 minutes)

Discuss:

- Did anyone change their verdict?
 - Should juries consider intent?
 - Is following the law always the same as doing what is right?
-

Step 5 — Writing Reflection (Homework or 15 minutes)

Students write a **5-paragraph essay** responding to:

- Should justice be blind?
 - Did your opinion change after learning mitigating circumstances?
-

Student Jury Packet

Jury Instructions

You are a member of a jury. Your responsibility is to decide each case based only on:

- The law
- The evidence

You must determine:

- Is the defendant guilty?
 - What level of offense applies?
-

Case 1 — Larceny

Law Summary

- \$1000 or more = Grand Larceny (felony)
- Less than \$1000 = Petit Larceny (misdemeanor)

Definition

Larceny = Taking property with intent to deprive the owner.

Case

Bill stole \$1000 worth of merchandise from a store.
He was recorded and admitted to the theft.

Case 2 — Parental Kidnapping

Law Summary

Interfering with custody across state lines is a felony.

Case

Mary took her child out of state and refused access to the father.

Case 3 — Assault

Law Summary

Causing serious bodily injury intentionally is a felony.

Case

Henry attacked Bob with a baseball bat, breaking his arm and ribs.

Jury Decision Worksheet

For each case:

Verdict (Based on Law Only):

Guilty / Not Guilty

What evidence supports your decision?

What law applies?

Expanded Mitigating Circumstances

Case 1 – Bill (Larceny)

Bill is a father of four children under the age of 12. Six months ago, the factory where he worked for 18 years closed without warning. His unemployment benefits have recently run out, and he has been trying to support his family by working three part-time minimum-wage jobs.

Last month, Bill’s wife was hospitalized with a serious illness and cannot currently work. The family has fallen behind on rent and utilities.

The items Bill stole included:

- **Winter coats**
- **Shoes**
- **Basic clothing**
- **Low-cost toys for Christmas**

None of the items were for Bill himself.

If Bill is convicted of a felony and sent to prison, his children will likely be placed into the foster care system because there is no nearby family able to take them.

Case 2 – Mary (Parental Kidnapping)

Mary has joint custody of her three-year-old daughter. Over several months, she noticed that after visits with the father:

- **The child frequently had unexplained bruises**
- **The child became withdrawn and fearful**
- **The child began having nightmares and refused to speak about visits**

Mary reported her concerns to Child Protective Services multiple times. Investigators said they could not find enough physical evidence to remove custody rights.

One caseworker privately told Mary that she also had concerns but could not act without stronger proof.

Mary feared that if she continued to follow the custody order, her child could be seriously harmed.

She left the state and lived quietly under a different name while trying to keep her daughter safe.

Case 3 – Henry (Assault)

Henry’s 16-year-old daughter accused Bob of sexually assaulting her several months earlier.

An investigation was conducted, but the case was dropped when her therapist determined she was too traumatized to testify in court. Without her testimony, prosecutors said they could not secure a conviction.

Since the incident:

- **Henry’s daughter has struggled with anxiety and panic attacks**
- **She transferred schools but encountered Bob again at a public event**
- **When she saw him, she experienced a severe emotional breakdown**

Henry witnessed his daughter collapse in fear.

Moments later, he attacked Bob with a baseball bat before officers restrained him.

Henry later told police he “lost control” and believed the system had failed to protect his child.

Reconsideration Questions

Did you change your verdict?

Why or why not?

Should mitigating circumstances matter in court?

Do the ends ever justify the means?

Essay Assignment

Prompt:

Should justice be blind?

Did your opinion change after learning the mitigating circumstances? Why?

Essay Structure

Paragraph 1 — Introduction with three reasons

Paragraphs 2–4 — Explain each reason

Paragraph 5 — Conclusion

Suggested Rubric (100 Points)

Criteria	Points
Use of evidence	25
Clear reasoning	25
Understanding of justice concepts	25
Organization	15
Mechanics	10

Teacher Upload Description

This lesson engages students in a jury simulation where they evaluate criminal cases using legal standards before considering mitigating circumstances. Students explore the tension between rule of law, fairness, and moral responsibility while practicing evidence-based reasoning and structured argument writing.

Strong Upgrade Options (You Will Like These)

If you want, next I can create:

1. A **courtroom-style printable packet** (looks like a real jury file)
2. A **judge's bench script** so you can run it like a trial
3. A **verdict polling system** (changes before vs after mitigating info)
4. A **constitutional connection version** (Due Process + 14th Amendment)

My recommendation for maximum impact in your class:

Next we build the **courtroom version with jury foreperson sheets** — it becomes one of those lessons students remember years later.

I think in the mitigating circumstances they need to be fleshed out a little bit now they do not convey the emotion.

You're exactly right—and your instinct here is a **very good teacher move**.

Right now the mitigating circumstances are *informational*, not *human*.

If students don't **feel the tension**, the entire “Should justice be blind?” question falls flat.

What we want is:

- More **context**
- More **stakes**
- More **moral discomfort**
- But still **age-appropriate and not sensationalized**

Below are **enhanced, classroom-appropriate versions** that increase emotional weight without being graphic.

You can drop these directly into your student packet.

Expanded Mitigating Circumstances

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Why This Version Works Better

These revisions:

- Add **timeline**
- Show **failed institutions**
- Introduce **real stakes**
- Increase **moral ambiguity**
- Force students to confront:

Legal guilt vs. moral justification

This is exactly where the best discussion happens.

One Powerful Question to Add After Each Case

Have students answer:

“Is this person legally guilty but morally understandable?”

That question alone will spark a 20-minute discussion.

One Teacher Move That Makes This Lesson Explode

After students change (or don't change) their verdicts, ask:

“Do you want judges or humans deciding your future?”

You will get:

- Rule of law arguments
- Mercy arguments
- Bias arguments
- System trust arguments

It hits:

- Due Process
 - Equal Protection
 - Judicial philosophy
-

Recommendation (Based on Your Teaching Style)

You should **reveal mitigating circumstances one case at a time**, not all at once.

That creates:

- Emotional whiplash
 - Real reconsideration
 - Authentic debate
-

If you want, next I can create something extremely powerful for this lesson:

A two-column “Before vs After” verdict tracking sheet

(where students must publicly commit, then decide if they will change).

That single sheet dramatically increases:

- student investment
- honesty
- discussion intensity

Do you want the tone of this lesson to lean more toward:

A. Rule of law / Constitution focus

B. Ethics & morality debate

C. Courtroom realism (my guess is this fits your style best)

Ethics and morality and prepare the unloadable PDG

Your ethics-focused, classroom-ready packet is finished.

Download the **Lady Justice – Ethics & Morality Simulation** PDF

Would you like me to create a second version that looks like a **formal courtroom packet** (jury file cover, case numbers, foreperson signature page, and a “verdict before / verdict after” tracking sheet)? That version tends to spark much stronger debate and makes the lesson feel very real to students.

I want the Teacher lesson plan as presented above turned into a PDF I also want the mitigating circumstance exactly as the expanded version above

Your teacher lesson plan is finished and includes the **expanded mitigating circumstances exactly as written.**

Download the **Lady Justice Teacher Lesson Plan (Expanded Mitigating Circumstances)**

Would you like me to also create:

1. A **matching student packet** that aligns page-by-page with this teacher plan
2. A **courtroom-style version** (case file cover, jury foreperson signature, verdict before/after sheet)
3. A **discussion slide deck** you can project during the lesson (this works especially well with the emotional reveal timing)

